

President Bush's military adventure in Iraq has failed. Over the last few months, the country has slid closer and closer to a full-scale civil war. Just a few days ago the spiritual leader of the Iraqi Shia, Sistani, explained that [there is nothing he can do to prevent civil war](#) . It's time for a frank discussion about the situation in Iraq.

Last month, 18 of my colleagues and I sent a [letter](#) to the President, asking him to give the Congress and the American people an honest assessment of the situation in Iraq. In particular, we asked him to clarify whether Iraq is in a state of civil war. As our letter mentioned, "Most political scientists use the threshold of 1,000 people killed by two or more political factions fighting for political power or control of an area when determining if a civil war is on-going. By that objective standard, Iraq has long ago entered into a civil war: more than 2,500 US troops have died and the Iraqi Health Ministry estimates that 50,000 Iraqis have died since the war began in March 2003. "

Rather than telling the truth to the American people, the Bush Administration has once again engaged in an orchestrated campaign to smear its critics. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accused critics of Administration policy as suffering from "[moral or intellectual confusion](#)" and compared critics of the war to those who Nazi appeasement. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [joined in the attack](#) , drawing an analogy between critics and supporters of slavery.

While the Bush administration may claim that criticism of the government "emboldens the enemy," I disagree. As one blogger [wrote](#) , "Dissent and disagreement with government is the life's blood of human freedom; and not merely because it is the first roadblock against the kind of tyranny the men Mr. Rumsfeld likes to think of as "his" troops still fight, this very evening, in Iraq."

We must not succumb to these misguided efforts to impugn our character. As representatives of the American people, it is our duty to ask the difficult questions and expose flawed and misguided policies. On Monday, House and Senate Democratic Leaders and ranking members from the key national security committees wrote to the President about the [continued deterioration of the security situation in Iraq](#)

. The mistakes made by the Bush administration in Iraq demand [accountability](#)

, instead of vicious attacks. I can assure you that the Congress will shed the rubber-stamp

reputation it has had under Republican leadership if Democrats win back control. Instead of blindly following the President, we will take the country in a new direction.

In this critical time, our country deserves a frank discussion about the issues we face. If the Republican Leadership in Congress refuses to bring up the legislation that is needed, Democrats will not go along with their plans to adjourn for the fall. Our nation's leaders have a responsibility to address America's priorities, such as:

- implementing the 9/11 Commission recommendations,